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RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6079  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001585

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY ALLEGES INTIMIDATION, CONTAINMENT

REF: A. ALGIERS 1527

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 1559

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In what he describes as an effort to confine his party's influence to its historical base in the Kabylie region, Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) leader Said Sadi alleged privately to us that RCD activists have been intimidated, kidnapped and, in some cases, tortured. In the run-up to the November 29 local elections, scores of RCD candidates in districts outside the party's Kabylie stronghold were rejected with security and administrative justifications (ref B), and the October 29 edition of the government daily El Moujahid featured an official response to these cases from the Interior ministry. Beyond the media furore over rejected candidate slates and the role of Interior lie more sordid examples of the obstacles facing the RCD, most of which have remained out of the public eye. END SUMMARY.

A CANDIDATE KIDNAPPED, THREATENED  
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[1](#)2. (C) RCD President Dr. Said Sadi, along with Bejaia MP and RCD Secretary for International Relations Tarek Mira, told poloff on October 27 that the ruling regime was playing "a dangerous game" to prevent the RCD from expanding and competing in the elections outside of the troubled Kabylie region, RCD's traditional Berber base. The October 29 edition of El Moujahid featured a detailed government response to an appeal filed by the RCD, but the response focused solely on the issue of the candidates rejected by the Interior ministry (ref B). RCD's complaints run much deeper. According to Sadi, in the wilaya of El Golea, an Arab oasis town in central Algeria, RCD candidate Abdelhakim Benmechrah was blindfolded and kidnapped for a week at the end of September. According to Sadi and Mira, Benmechrah was even threatened personally by the wali (governor) "not to bring this Berber party into Arab lands." Benmechrah, the son of a wealthy Toyota dealer, subsequently had his candidacy rejected by the police for security reasons after the El Golea RCD slate was submitted on October 9.

BERBERS AND HARKIS "NOT WELCOME" IN ARAB AREAS  
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[1](#)3. (C) In the wilaya of Chlef, halfway between Algiers and

the western city of Oran, Sadi recounted that RCD candidate Hamouni was also confronted personally by the wali one week before the October 9 deadline for the submission of candidate slates. After telling him that "the RCD has no chance in an Arabic zone," the wali told Hamouni, according to Sadi and Mira, that the administration would produce and publicize a file showing that he was the son of a harki (a collaborator with the French during the war for independence) unless he withdrew his candidacy. Hamouni was later among the candidates rejected after local police review, again for security reasons.

FROM MP TO SECURITY THREAT... IN FIVE MONTHS  
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14. (C) Meanwhile, in the wilaya of Ghardaia, Sadi and Mira told the story of a man named Krouchi, who up until the May legislative elections had served as an MP representing the entire wilaya in Algiers. Krouchi presented himself as a candidate for the local elections on the RCD slate for his local district, only to be told by the police that he was rejected for security reasons. Sadi pointed out that the Interior ministry has complete dossiers on every member of parliament, and nobody can be elected to the parliament without its blessing. He shook his head and laughed at how the same individual could be acceptable as a national parliamentarian in Algiers but somehow a threat to security within his own tiny district.

INTIMIDATION NOT A NEW PHENOMENON  
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15. (C) Sadi said that intimidation and even violence were not new obstacles for the RCD. He told the story and showed

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graphic pictures of former journalist Djaffar Ait Mesbah, a close personal friend, who was allegedly tortured in early 2005 simply for being an RCD member and a close friend of Sadi's. Ait Mesbah, according to Sadi, was held for over a week, beaten, and cut repeatedly with razor blades all over his body. Bleach, lemon juice and salt were then poured on the wounds. As soon as he was released, the RCD leadership took a series of photos of Ait Mesbah, which Sadi showed to poloff. Sadi said that he used his own personal connections in France to get Ait Mesbah sent there to recover, but that his old friend was "still not doing well" and had suffered a nervous breakdown.

16. (C) COMMENT: Allegations of intimidation and torture are difficult to verify, and have remained notably absent from the press in favor of a public battle over slates of rejected candidates. However, Said Sadi's own personal reputation, the detail of the stories, and the photographic evidence all lend credibility to the claims, which are consistent with previous reporting in ref A and B. Perhaps owing to the RCD's traditional identification with Berber issues, the government seems to prefer to contain and minimize the party.

This stance, enforced by an aggressive Interior ministry, can only strengthen a popular perception (ref B) that the upcoming elections are being managed to produce a predictable outcome and perpetuate the status quo.

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